

Betrothal

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Summary: Astrid is of marrying age and all the eligible bachelors on the island have come to ask for her hand. All but one.

Betrothal

Astrid was annoyed. She leaned against one of the walls inside her home and listened to her parents' argument.

"I know he is the Chief's son. But we have had many other suitors bringing gifts and offering more than what is fair. We can only wait so long."

"But he's the Chief's son. Our status would be permanently secured."

"I know, but he hasn't made an offer."

"Have you asked Astrid about it?"

"No, but I will."

Astrid was finally of marrying age and, as was the custom, had suddenly been all but forbidden to so much as look at any of the boys her age, whose families were trying to convince her father to concede to a marriage. It wasn't proper to have contact with a suitor, and they were all suitors, all except Hiccup.

Astrid held in the sigh that threatened to escape her, and instead rubbed her eyes. Just weeks ago they were sitting side by side watching the sun set across the water, but the day she was of marring age he was nowhere to be found.

Her only company was Ruffnut, who was going through an equally frustrating ordeal, and of course her Blue Nadder. She kept telling

herself she didn't mind, Hiccup would come, they had something special. But he hadn't come and Astrid was quickly passing annoyed, she was furious.

"Snotlout's family is offering a substantial amount. I think itâ€"

Astrid would have interrupted them herself, but a knock on their door did it for her. She peered around the corner to watch her father open the door. At first the only thing she saw was a large hairy silhouette, but as her father shifted slightly she immediately recognized the slim build of Hiccup standing beside the large mass. She did her best to keep her heart from racing.

"I know why you're here." Her father grumbled.

"Oh." She heard Hiccup mutter quietly. "Right then." In the dimming light of the evening she could see him square his shoulders and jerk his head. She heard a whimper of protest followed by an angrily whispered "Toothless!" and an odd clattering sound.

"Go on then boy." She heard Stoik the Vast say as he nudged his son's shoulder.

"Iâ€"I think this isâ€"I've brought this." Astrid leaned further away from the wall to watch Hiccup drop a large bag of coins into her father's hands. "And this." Her eyes went wide as he placed an enormous sword at her father's feet.

"Well Iâ€" He was interrupted for a second time as Hiccup spoke again.

"And this." He placed a spear alongside the sword. "I know I'm not the fastest," He grunted as he bent to pick something up and struggled to right himself, "or the strongest Viking on this island." Hiccup held out a large double sided axe and her father shifted the bag of coins in his arms to take it. As soon as he did Hiccup leaned over to grab something else. Astrid gasped when she saw the shining shield he held, the likes of which she could have never dreamed. She quickly covered her mouth, but realized that both of her parents had gasped at the sight as well.

"I'm not a warrior," Hiccup said as he held the shield out, "but I know a valuable trade, and I'm next to be Chief. I'll take good care of her." Astrid watched her father nod at her mother to come take the shield. She carried it off as her father stepped aside.

"Come in." He said in a quiet tone Astrid rarely heard him use. "Let's talk." Hiccup picked up the spear and sword and followed her father to the kitchen. Astrid slipped behind the wall again and stopped breathing. She would be mortified if her parents caught her snooping, after all she was doing her best to maintain an air of non-chalance about the entire debacle.

She heard the clattering of metal on the table followed by the soft clinking of coins. Then the negotiating began. Her father and Stoik did most of the talking, with a few quiet interjections from Hiccup, until the discussion of her dowry came up.

"This is far more than we have for a dowry andâ€"

"It doesn't matter." Hiccup said suddenly. "I'm sure there is plenty, and I'll add to it so if anything should happen to me she'll be taken care of." Everyone was quiet for a moment then her father spoke.

"Then the only thing left is to ensure Astrid's approval. Astrid!" He called. She stood still for a few seconds hoping to make it seem as if she had been off somewhere else instead of lurking just outside the door. She walked at a quick, but casual pace, doing her best to look calm and completely uninterested, until she stood in the doorway of the room. The first person she looked at was Hiccup, who had gone completely pale and was staring down at the table with absolute concentration.

Her father stood and gestured her over to his side. "Astrid. Hiccup the Horrendous and Stoik the Vast have made a generous proposal and I think it is in our best interest to accept." Her father's hand was heavy and firm on her shoulder and she glanced at it then up at him. His face was completely neutral as if the entire decision was hers.

It shouldn't have been, that wasn't how things were done, but her mother always said something about her father changed the minute he held her in his strong arms. He'd always expected more from her, but he'd always given more too.

She looked at the table, covered in weapons, and she suddenly realized Hiccup had made every one of them. She looked at Stoik who gave her a small smile, then stared at Hiccup, hoping he would look at her with those big green eyes and smile, or nod, or give her some sort of acknowledgment, but he continued to stare at the table.

She took a minute to consider what had changed between them. A few months ago they were just two kids racing each other across the sky until it was too dark to see and their dragons were too tired to fly. Then they would flop down on the cold grass and connect the tiny dots in the sky, making pictures from the balls of light, and laugh until they couldn't breathe.

But as her birthday got closer their races got shorter, conversations got quieter, and they suddenly weren't kids anymore. The few kisses she'd given him were just silly forgotten moments and she'd be married off. She should have been glad it was him, but he wouldn't look in her eyes and for some reason it made her chest ache.

"I approve." She said quietly, willing him to look at her. "I'm sure . . . it will be a good marriage." She saw Hiccup flinch at her words.

"Then it's settled!" Her father shouted as he shoed her out of the room. From just outside the room she watched a still pale and somber Hiccup shake her father's hand, sealing their contract. She was going to marry him, but he didn't seem to be happy about it. Astrid marched outside and whistled for her dragon. As she climbed on the dragon's back she decided that she wasn't happy about their contract either.

* * *

><p>Astrid watched the sun set from high above the clouds and had let her dragon fly without any restriction or guidance. Astrid didn't care where they went. All she could think about was that she and Hiccup were getting married, and he wouldn't even look at her.<p>

They landed just beside Astrid's home, and she effortlessly jumped down. With quick practiced hands she removed the saddle and set it down on the grass. She patted the dragon's nose, sending her away, and picked up the saddle. She carried it over to the tiny hut where their tools and extra food was stored.

Astrid hoisted the saddle on top of several barrels and ran her hand over the smooth leather. She had watched Hiccup make the saddle just for her, and she watched him make others. Hers had taken twice as long and looked three times as nice, she thought it had been because he cared more about her, but now she was sure she had been wrong.

She brushed her bangs out of her face and started walking back toward her home.

"Astrid." She heard her name at the same time she felt a hand wrap around her wrist. She spun around and pulled her dagger from the holster on her thigh. When she had stopped moving her dagger was pressed against her captor's neck. She was inches from his face and was shocked to find herself staring into Hiccup's wide, startled eyes.

"Hiccup!"

"Hi." He said as he dropped his hand and leaned away. She pulled her dagger away from his neck and stuck it back in her holster. She was about to ask why he was sneaking up on her just outside her own home when he suddenly grabbed her hand. "Come with me." She realized she was being pulled toward Toothless, who had been completely camouflaged in the darkness, and pulled her hand out of his. She didn't much feel like going anywhere with him at the moment. He turned around and looked at her with his sad green eyes. She immediately felt the familiar power those stupid green eyes had over her.

"Please?" With a huff she pushed past him and climbed onto Toothless. She sat quietly with her arms folded as he climbed on in front of her and slid his prosthetic leg into the gear on the saddle. He crouched down preparing to take off. A few weeks ago she would have wrapped her arms around him and held on much tighter than she needed to, but instead Astrid lightly rested her hands on Hiccup's shoulders as they shot off into the night.

She could feel his muscles shift and tense under her hands and noticed again that he'd grown. Not so much that anyone had said anything, but his shoulders were broader, his arms were stronger and she knew he was working on a new, slightly taller leg soon.

They were high above the island heading for the secluded spot, their spot, that they had stopped visiting a few weeks ago. As soon as Toothless was on the ground she jumped down and turned her back on them to stare at the moon. Neither spoke as Astrid watched the sky and Hiccup's slowly walked to her side.

"Astrid?" He asked after a few unbearably long minutes.

"Yeah?" She snapped.

"Can I ask you something?"

"You just did."

"Why . . ." he sighed. "Didâ€"did you agree because . . . because your dad expected you to, or because I'm the chief's son, or . . . or because you wanted to?" Astrid drew her eyebrows together as Hiccup shuffled closer to her side.

"Did you show up at my house because your dad wanted you to, or because that's what you're supposed to do, or because you wanted to?"

"I asked you first." Astrid turned to look at him and found him staring at the ground.

"Why won't you look at me?" She demanded. "Did something about me instantly change on my birthday?"

"Everything changed on your birthday."

They stood silently for a minute before she finally spoke. "I agreed because I thought we had something special." She snapped her eyes shut and fought back the very un-viking like tears that were suddenly dying to escape her eyes.

"Oh." He whispered.

Oh. She thought. I kept your secret. I stood by you when everyone else had turned their back on you. Doesn't that count for anything?
"Your turn." She replied sharply.

"I . . . I came to your house because . . . I'm in love with you and I have been for as long as I can remember."

Astrid spun around and stared at him with wide eyes.

"I know I'm supposed to marry a large woman who will bear massive viking children and ensure the survival of our tribe."

Astrid's mother had always said her hips were too small to bear anything.

"I know I'm supposed to take over as chief and marry a woman with high status to ensure that no one ever questions my authority."

Astrid's father was a butcher.

"I know that when someone asks me to make them a sword to give your father when they propose I'm supposed to make it perfect."

Astrid felt her eyebrows rise.

"But I've never been one to follow tradition." Astrid smiled slightly

at his comment. "I'm sorry, but I couldn't stand the thought of you spending the rest of your life with . . . anyone else. I couldn't imagine spending the rest of my life with anyone but you."

"Oh." She said with what little breath she could draw into her lungs.

"Astrid." Still staring at the ground he took her hands in his. "I wanted to ask you . . . if . . . if you . . . if you really wanted to m-marry me . . . do you?"

Astrid pulled back her hand, balled it into a fist, and punched him.

"I'll take that as a no." He whispered.

"If you're going to insult me at least look my in the eye while you do it."

Hiccup stared at her with wide eyes and she punched him again. "That is for asking stupid questions I've already answered." She punched him a third time. "And that is for waiting so long. My father was this close to . . ." Something about the somber look of his face made her stop.

"I wanted to ask you. But that's just not how we Vikings do things." He said in an impressive imitation of his father. "Everything changed when I was asked to make the first of a long, long line of proposal gifts that everyone but me would be giving you. I wanted to talk to you about it, butâ€"

"That's not how we do things." She answered.

"I was so busy I only had time to work on mine in the evenings and . . . and they had to be the best, but . . . it didn't seem right. You're Astrid Hofferson. The girl who has terrified and captivated me for as long as I can remember, and I'm just supposed to walk up to your house with my arms full of stuff and . . . and that's it? You deserve better than that." He grabbed her hands again as he stepped closer. "You . . ." he brushed her bangs off of her forehead, "you deserve better than all of this."

Astrid found herself staring into Hiccup's eyes trying to breathe, and be calm, and blink, and fight back the urge to tackle him to the ground and kiss him senseless. She knew something was going to have to give.

"We're betrothed now." She whispered, suddenly standing close enough to count every one of the freckles on his nose. "If anyone knew we were alone . . . together . . ."

"Toothless is here." He whispered as his hand continued brushing her hair back.

"The rumors would be . . ." Her eyes drifted shut of their own free will.

"Everyone would talk . . ." His forehead pressed against hers.

"I don't care." She said quietly as she closed the distance between

them. She gave him a quick gentle kiss and pulled back just a little. Hiccup wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her against him. Astrid smiled. If this was how she'd spend the rest of her life she couldn't complain.

"I should take you home." He whispered against her ear causing her to shiver.

"Yâ€"yeah. You probably should."

"I don't want to."

"If it helps I don't want you to either."

"I think I'll keep you here for a bit longer then." He pressed his lips to hers gently at first, then as his arms wrapped more tightly around her became more forceful, possessive even. The message was clear. She was his, and that was just fine with her.

End
file.